

Sample *Request for Information* Questions:

ALA's E-rate Task Force has developed, collected and organized the following list of questions to ask technology vendors. This list is not exhaustive and each question will not be relevant in all library situations; however, these suggested questions are offered as assistance to libraries for developing their own list of questions to ask of vendors when evaluating Technological Protection Measures for the purposes of CIPA:

General

1. How long has this company provided filtering, blocking or other technological protection measures such as those prescribed by CIPA?
2. Describe ownership and strategic partnerships of this company?
3. Describe the primary customer base for this company and the specific product(s) being considered?
4. What library specific references can be provided for this company's products and services?
5. Describe this company's currently available products or services which libraries might include in their plans for compliance with CIPA. If possible, describe future product or service developments or plans.
6. Do any of this company's products employ Open Source code?
7. Most libraries will need to determine by October 29, 2003 whether or not they will pursue purchase of a technology in order to comply with CIPA. What efforts has or will this company make in order to provide libraries with the information they need by the October certification deadline for CIPA compliance?

Blocking and Filtering

8. What method or combination of methods does this product use in blocking or filtering materials from Internet access? URL analysis, content analysis, automated or formula driven analysis, word blocking, etc.?
9. List and describe all categories of materials that this product blocks or filters?
10. What criteria are used to determine what is blocked?
11. Assuming that this product offers different levels or categories for filtering, please describe the configuration that would most closely match the minimum requirements of CIPA.

12. Described the customization possible for customers regarding the levels or categories of materials blocked or filtered by this product?
13. Does the customer have the ability to adjust block lists (whether key word, URL or other) by adding or exempting items? Does this product support locally created block lists?
14. How frequently are the block lists, blocking formulas, white lists, etc. for this product updated?
15. Are block lists made available for review by customers?
16. If a customer requests that a site be unblocked, what is the turnaround time for acting on such a request?
17. Are unblocking requests reviewed or are they acted upon automatically?
18. If blocking or filtering is done through computer programming, does the program have the ability to “learn” or adjust to the needs of the library environment?
19. If blocking or filtering is done manually, what is this company’s commitment to adjusting its product to the needs of the library environment?
20. Does this product provide a means for warning users that a site has been blocked? If so, does it disclose the reasoning behind the block? If so, can the library customize the message displayed to the user?
21. Does this product block pages based on the content of images as called for by CIPA or does it rely on text? If image content is considered, please explain how.
22. Does the product support blocking by protocol or activity, e.g. e-mail, chat, games, peer-to-peer transactions, etc.?
23. How does the product perform in published evaluations of ‘overblocking’ and ‘underblocking?’”
24. What features does this product offer that would assist libraries in minimizing overblocking and underblocking?

Disabling

Nearly all of the Supreme Court Justices indicated that they made their decisions in favor of upholding CIPA and its requirements for libraries based on their understanding of the ease with which filtering and blocking technologies could be disabled or disengaged upon request.

25. Describe the process for temporarily disabling this product?
26. Can the system administrator delegate this process to other users?
27. Can the filter be easily disabled by staff without their having 'administrator privileges'?
28. Approximately how long will this process take each time it is requested?
29. Are easy step-by-step instructions provided for the disabling/enabling process?
30. Libraries often employ hardware and software security precautions for securing workstations. How can this product be temporarily disabled for legitimate requests without interfering with the integrity of the workstation?
31. In a networked environment, is it possible to disable this product for one user without disabling for the entire network? If so, is this process practicable?
32. Is multiple, simultaneous workstation disabling possible with this product? Within what limitations?
33. Can this product be used in conjunction with other technology, such as smart cards, barcodes or passwords, to allow automation of the disabling process?

Total Cost of Ownership

34. What are the initial (one-time) costs for this product?
35. How is the product priced? By the workstation? By the number of workstations? By the number of simultaneous users? What are the increments in which licenses are offered – e.g. 1-49, 50-99, 100-499, 500 to 999, 1,000 to 1,500?
36. Is there an annual subscription or renewal fee required for proper function of the product? If so, what is the rate? For how long are quoted renewal prices guaranteed?
37. If costs are based on number of users, indicate the rate.
38. What additional hardware and/or software are needed for proper performance?
39. Are discounts offered for volume purchasing?
40. Does this company offer a turn-key solution, server or software?

41. Are there earlier versions of this product that are no longer supported by this company?
42. Approximately how often are major software updates offered for purchase?
43. What other costs will contribute to the total cost of ownership of this product?

Support, Training and Management

44. What type of technical support is offered for this product? Does it require an additional fee?
45. What are the hours for technical support?
46. How many simultaneous users are supported?
47. How much training is required in order to manage this product?
48. Is remote administration of this product feasible? By a company representative?
By a system administrator on library staff?
49. Approximately how much on site time will be required of local staff in order to support library users where this product is in use?
50. Does this product support simultaneous different blocking or filtering configurations for individual workstations or groups of workstations?
51. What measures of stability are used by this company and how does this product score using those measures?
52. How are software and/or database updates transmitted to customers?
53. Is personally identifiable information captured by this product or in the process of using the system? If yes, can this feature be disabled? How often is information purged?
54. What other logging options are included in this product?
55. How secure is the software from user disabling?
56. Should removal of this product be required, describe the ease and completeness of this process.

Technical Requirements

57. Is this product or service available as a client, server and or proxy based system?
58. Which operating systems are compatible with this product?
59. What server software is compatible with this product?
60. Can this product work effectively on a multi-platform network?
61. What integrated library systems are compatible with this product?
62. Does this product communicate with library automation systems in order to perform tasks such as determining patron age for varying levels of filtering or blocking?
63. Beyond typical network or desktop equipment, what additional hardware is needed for optimal operation of this product?
64. How does this product work with hardware and software based security applications?
65. Are there special network requirements (LAN or WAN) for optimal operation of this product?
66. How much memory is required on the host machine (server and/or workstation)?
67. What is the minimum processing speed required for optimal operation of this product?
68. What telecommunications connectivity or speeds are required for optimal operation of this product?
69. Which browsers are compatible with this product? Which is/are preferred?
70. Does this product have any known conflicts or incompatibilities with any software or hardware (including firewall products)? If so, describe.